

# CHILDREN AT RISK NEWSLETTER

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Submitted by David H. Allingham

Well, the days are getting shorter, the temperature is a lot cooler, there seems to be a lot more cloudy days, I'm feeling all depressed and stressed out at the same time, and my wallet can't seem to keep any money in it... ah, school must be starting! How quickly has the summer gone, even my son has commented (more than a few times) that it seems like yesterday was the last day of school and where did the summer go?

First, I'd like to welcome our newest Board member, Paul Lacroix, to our dedicated bunch of volunteers! We have some interesting times ahead and one of them is a commitment to establish an ongoing program for higher needs children.

This year CAR will be focusing on:

- 1) improving our visibility within schools and the community; and
- 2) balancing the services we provide to our community.

To do this, I expect that we will see a reduced positive balance in our cash flow for this year and that we may run negative for a quarter or two. We, the Board, continue to look for ways to stabilize our cash flows, reduce our operating costs, and improve service. I've had more than a few days where these goals seem to be mutually exclusive but I remain optimistic.

Speaking of optimistic ... our now famous pumpkin whatchamacallit (Hey, it's famous, you should already know what it is!) is coming up for its 11<sup>th</sup> year in October and we need a lot of help to make it successful and hope you can find the time to spare a few hours to volunteer. We'd really appreciate any assistance you are able to provide. (As would those others who are already committed to help.)

We've also entered into talks with the Ottawa Chapter of Autism Ontario on working together on an exciting opportunity for a major fund-raising activity. We'll let you know how things progress.

Overall I'm feeling very positive about the up-coming year for CAR and I hope you are, and will be, too!



## ROGERS CABLE 22 TELEVISION COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

In September 2006, Rogers Television will announce a one-year community partnership with Children at Risk with the option to renew for an additional year. Christina Araujo, Coordinator of Volunteer Services for Rogers Television, elaborates:

"The basis of this partnership is Rogers Television's commitment to making a significant contribution to Children at Risk's ongoing ability to positively impact families of children with Autism, through growth and development in the area of communications and increased awareness in the community about Children at Risk. Rogers Television has set a **target goal** of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) (in each of the two years) in revenue generation to be applied to programs and services administered by Children at Risk."

Children at Risk is overwhelmed by this outstanding, innovative community endeavor by Rogers Television! Our Board of Directors sees this as an opportunity to establish stronger relationships within the Ottawa community, while raising valuable funds for our programs and services. More on this development as it unfolds!

### *Children at Risk's Annual Open House*

Thursday, October 5, 2006

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

2nd Floor, 235 Donald Street

Come meet the Board Members!  
Come meet the Group Facilitators!  
Come find out how we can help your family.

**Note:** Regarding the Annual Open House ... please find enclosed flyer. Feel free to copy these for distribution in your school/community!

**2006/2007 CHILDREN AT RISK BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

President: David Allingham  
 Vice-President: Marlene Stepan  
 Secretary: Mary McDonald  
 Treasurer: Dean Ryan  
 Member at Large: Craig Perkin  
 Member at Large: Paul Lacroix  
 Member at Large: Andrea Allingham  
 Member at Large: Ed Gratton

**GET TO KNOW YOUR BOARD!****Paul Lacroix – Member at Large**

My dear wife Debbie and I have been blessed with four children, Lisa 21, Rachel 14, David 12, Daniel 9 and a 2 year old granddaughter. David was diagnosed as Autistic when he was 2 years old. Our family has been associated with Children at Risk since 1996. I have helped with may of the fundraising events over the past ten years including having been part of the committees for the 8-ball tournaments, Rockin' for Risk as well as The Hope Volleyball. Being in sales, I am used to Boards and meetings, so it is not unfamiliar territory for me. I also bring with me, my outgoing personality and the ability to GET THINGS DONE. I look forward to serving as a Board Member for Children at Risk!

**NEW CAR NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

I've been asked to introduce myself but first things first .... thanks goes to **Janet Kooiman** for the many years of CAR newsletter service. We truly appreciate everything you have done.

Now to introduce myself ... Yves and I have two boys, Eric is 13 (going on 16) and Denis is 10 and happens to be autistic. Denis is non-verbal but definitely has no problem communicating his needs. We've been involved in the autism community for over 6 years. I am involved with the AO (by running the Parent Support Group), CAR (volunteering for various events, selling raffle tickets and Entertainment Books and now doing the Newsletter) and finally the French Autism Chapter (by attending the month Chapter meetings and Yves is on the Camp organizing committee).

**PRIMUS CANADA GIVES A HELPING HAND**

Children at Risk wishes to acknowledge another community business sponsorship. Effective immediately, **Primus Canada** is hosting both Web Site and Internet Services for our charity! Recognizing the value to the Autism Community, Primus knows the importance of providing services by email and information by website. Hats off to this community-minded organization for this generous and heartfelt donation!!

**CHARITY COORDINATOR'S MESSAGE**

Submitted by Brenda Reisch

WOW! I too wonder where the Summer went?! Fall is here and I don't know about the rest of you, but I feel I have hit the ground running on September 5<sup>th</sup>!

As David mentioned, we are gearing up for our Programs, as well as the fundraising activities and events that help to fund them. We will be running 7 Social Skill Groups for ASD children from ages 4 and up, as well as 2 Sibling Support Groups (for more information, visit our website at [www.childrenatrisk.ca](http://www.childrenatrisk.ca) or call 613-741-8255).

You will note our new Board of Directors for 2006/2007. Recently, the decision was made to have Board Members assume "portfolios" of responsibility to fulfill their role of a "working Board". Areas include Human Resources, Fundraising, Group Facilitation and Publicity & Promotion. They will be interacting with administration to help balance the workload and expand Children at Risk's profile, reach and services. Along with David, I too am excited and optimistic about the coming year and potential partnerships with others in the community to increase recognition and ultimately funds to increase and finance our service provision.

Looking back, it is now over 4 years since we have received any public monies for programs. Not to say it has been easy but we really have not "looked back", but forged ahead to "fill in the gaps" in services provided for the families in the Autism Community! We hope you enjoy reading our quarterly newsletter and look forward to seeing you at our Open House on October 5<sup>th</sup>!!



**FUNDRAISING UPDATE**

Submitted by Brenda Reisch  
Fundraising Chairperson (since June 2006)

**ANNUAL FAMILY PICNIC/  
11<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CHILDREN AT RISK RAFFLE**

On Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, our Autism Community celebrated the start of summer with the Annual Family Picnic in Brewer Park! It was wonderful to see many families turn out for the BBQ, water play, cookie decorating, Tunis Shrine clowns & balloons, plasma cars, water balloon toss, watermelon and other activities!!

The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Raffle was also drawn at the Picnic (ticket winners can be viewed at our website [www.childrenatrisk.ca](http://www.childrenatrisk.ca)), with 40 draws of prizes valued over \$7,000. Many thanks to all those who bought/sold tickets! Two additional draws were done for Raffle Ticket Sellers, with Cheryl Mattice and Christine Sinding winning each a \$25 certificate for Lone Star Restaurants! A free draw for camping chairs was done at the Picnic, as well as 2 Plasmacars (winners Yves Desjardins & Jasper Johns).

We wish to thank all the wonderful volunteers who came forward to help with the Picnic by manning activity stations, setting up and cleaning up. Special mention to Steve & Stephanie Harrington (who helped all day & with loading supplies at 9 AM and unloading at 4 PM), along with Dean Ryan, who also helped load supplies and worked the BBQ! Sponsors included Humpty Dumpty for their chip donations, Vanier Loeb for a gift certificate towards supplies, Weston Bakeries for the buns and Cody Party Centres for the BBQ/propane rental donation. Hope everyone (and more!) can join us next year!!



**Note:** Look for a full page of photos from this year's picnic at the end of the newsletter.

**MACMILLAN'S FROZEN FOODS FALL CAMPAIGN**

Enclosed you will find a flyer detailing the mouthwatering selection of frozen cookie dough, muffin batter, cakes, pizza products and specialty Christmas items. Check out the new pie combos, gingerbread men, trans fat-free muffins and party hors d'oeuvres! Orders need to be submitted to Children at Risk by **Friday, November 3rd** for delivery on **Tuesday, November 21st**. Please note that these products are not GF/CF and the cookies/muffins may contain nuts. If you need additional flyers, please email or call the office ([carsup@magma.ca](mailto:carsup@magma.ca) 613-741-8255) and we will cheerfully send out more!!

**2007 ENTERTAINMENT COUPON BOOKS**



Hot off the presses, the valuable *2007 Entertainment Coupon Books* are **NOW** available at the bargain price of only **\$35!**

Already several parents are marketing this great savings book to colleagues, friends and families. With 50% discounts on dining out, fast foods, services, activities and merchandise, you cannot lose with buying this terrific book.

To own this valuable coupon book, just email [carsup@magma.ca](mailto:carsup@magma.ca) or call 741-8255. Books can also be obtained at 18 Quickie Convenience Stores across Ottawa (see [www.childrenatrisk.ca](http://www.childrenatrisk.ca) for a listing), as well as parents Merle (613-226-4982- CentrepoinTE, Brenda (613-741-5150 – east end) and the Kanata Optometry Centre (613-592-6193).

**DONOR'S CORNER**

- Deloitte & Touche LLP - \$250.
- United Way Bi-Annual Donor's Contribution - \$3,305.79.
- Community-Foundation of Ottawa - \$9,150.

**11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CELEBRITY-CARVED PUMPKIN CONTEST**



Phenomenal to believe, but we are entering our 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of this seasonal and fun event. Once more we will be displaying our Celebrity-Carved pumpkins in 4 malls – *Merivale Mall, Carlingwood Shopping Centre, Place d’Orleans and Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre!!*

This fundraiser invites local celebrities and media personalities to carve a pumpkin for Autism - with close to 100 jack- o-lantern creations to be seen in all 4 malls.

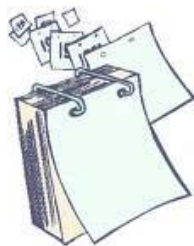
Please plan to join us at the Celebrity reception on Thursday, October 26th at Merivale Mall, with entertainment by John Lloyd’s “One Big Smile” music. The pumpkins will then be on display at all 4 malls until Saturday, October 28th. On Saturday, we know that Lincoln Fields is inviting little ones to come and get a treat (10 AM -3 PM), while decorating their own free mini pumpkin, and that Merivale Mall will be broadcasting with a live remote, face painters and other entertainment. We also encourage the celebrities to contribute Prize Packages with their pumpkin that will be bid Silent Auction style in the malls and (hopefully) on-line.

What is critically needed is volunteers to man the displays and a Mall Manager for each shopping centre! Please email [carsup@magma.ca](mailto:carsup@magma.ca) or call 613-741-8255 if you think you can help out in this area.

**UPCOMING EVENTS/ACTIVITIES**

Mark your calendars ....

- 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Rockin’ for Risk 50s/60s/70s Fundraising Dance – Saturday, April 14, 2007
- Ottawa 67’s 50/50 Ticket Sales – March 2007 (6 games)



**UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN INFO**

As this years’ campaign kicks off, we wanted to remind everyone that charitable donations through United Way can be directed to your charity of choice, whether they are a United Way charity or not. We welcome the direction of your contribution to Children at Risk to support the services and programs we provide for families raising a child with Autism! This way you can contribute to a workplace campaign and support Autism, as well!

Specifically, you need to list:

Name: Children at Risk, Ottawa  
 Revenue Canada Charitable Registration Number:  
 10691/3775/RR/0001

While CAR does not receive direct funding from United Way, our last bi-annual cheque from these directed contributions was over \$3,300! If you have any questions or require additional information, do not hesitate to contact our office!

**EVENT TICKET DONATIONS**

Please note that tickets are offered to Children at Risk members with current membership first, only leftover or short notice donations are posted on the Autism Support Ottawa email listing.

\*Currently we are requesting tickets for:

- WWE Smackdown Live  
September 19, 2006
- Barney Live  
September 23 & 24, 2006
- “World Famous” Lipizzaner Stallions  
November 11 & 12, 2006
- Cirque du Soleil’s Delirium  
November 24 & 25, 2006

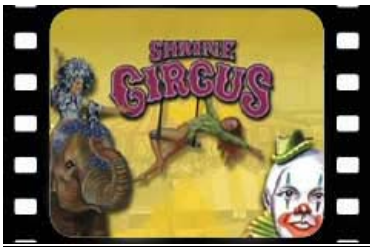
\*Requested tickets may or may/not be donated.



EVENT TICKET THANK YOU'S

*Experience the Magic in Your Hometown!*

Sean and Patricia Flanagan wrote ... *"Thanks so much for the Disney on Ice ticket donation. Four children from the audience were chosen to be in the opening ceremony of the show. Quinn and Seth were 2 of those 4! Seth got to make a Tarzan call into the microphone, then the 4 kids got to ride around on the ice ship with Mickey, Minnie, Goofy and Donald walking beside it! It was amazing! I'm sure the boys will be talking about this for a long time!"*



Merle Hagerman wrote ... *"Thanks so much for the Circus Tickets. My girls were fortunate enough to go the Sunday show, and enjoyed it a lot. The Shriners' kindness and generosity was much appreciated. Looking forward to next year!"*

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE DSW STUDENT PLACEMENTS

For 10 years, Algonquin College has collaborated with Children at Risk to provide an invaluable learning opportunity for the Developmental Services Worker (DSW) students. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the DSW Program, students complete a Family Field Placement that includes 20 hours of work in a family setting with a special needs child. Applications have already been submitted for the Fall semester, with placements to commence soon, but there will also be placements available for the Winter semester in January 2007. For more information, please visit our website at [www.childrenatrisk.ca](http://www.childrenatrisk.ca) to view the introductory letter and print off the application or call our office at 613-741-8255.

SIBLING & LIFESKILLS GROUPS UPDATE

Submitted by Lloyd Gonsalves

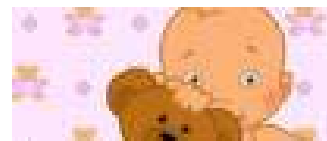
**Sibling Support Groups:** This past Spring, Children at Risk resumed the operation of their Sibling Support Groups, with a group for younger siblings ages 5-8 and older sibling ages 8-13. Jennifer Gonsalves and Nazima Khan facilitated the younger group, with myself and Jennifer running the group for older siblings. The groups were well-received and attended by enthusiastic brothers and sisters of children diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Based on our experiences, we plan to continue our facilitation of these groups with the following goals:

- 1) increasing the length of time for the older sibling group to 2 hours/week,
- 2) using the time to educate the siblings on ASD as well as provide them with strategies to cope and form better relationships with their siblings with ASD,
- 3) allowing the siblings the time to express their feelings in a safe and non-judgemental environment,
- 4) helping the siblings to understand their role within their family and to become better advocates for themselves, and
- 5) providing the siblings with an opportunity to have physical activity and form friendships.

**Lifeskills Group:** Jennifer and I also facilitated a pilot Lifeskills Group for children with ASD. This group allowed high-functioning ASD early and pre-teen children to work on practical life skills such as personal care, money management, meal planning, laundry, etc. on-site and out in the community. We found that the participants did very well in building relationships with each other and in their skill development. We look forward to another group this Fall with moderately-functioning ASD children, focusing on goals of building peer relationships, problem solving and appropriate social skills, as well as community awareness and daily living skills.

**Editor's Note:** We want to congratulate Jennifer and Lloyd on the birth of their son on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Adam weighed in at 7 lbs 5 oz. From Lloyd: "Adam and Jenn are doing very well. We are quite enjoying our little bundle, despite the lack of sleep!"



**'YES I CAN' AWARD**

Submitted by  
Merle Hagerman  
(one proud mom)

Ashley recently was nominated and received the 'Yes I Can' Award in the category of Social Learning. As the submission states: Ashley, who has an autism exceptionality, has truly blossomed.

She has changed over the last five years from a very withdrawn child, dependent on 1:1 adult support, to a sociable girl, who enjoys positive interactions with both adults and peers, just "one of the girls", requiring much less adult intervention. Photo is of Ashley receiving her award on June 8, 2006.



**SPECTRUM ART SHOW**

Submitted by Karen Lamberton

My son Clayton (who is 11) took part in The Spectrum Art Show which was held in Kingston on August 13. Clayton was able to display five of his paintings - they are abstract acrylic on canvas. Corina and Mark are summer students at the Kerry's Place Autism Services in Kingston, and their project was to collect art from local ASD kids and display it in various locations around Kingston.



**ASO NEWS**

***Autism Ontario – Ottawa Chapter***

***11th Annual Cycle for Autism***

Sunday, September 17, 2006

Ron Kolbus Building,

Lakeside Gardens, Britannia Park

100 & 60 km Scenic Road Loop Tours

20 & 10 km Family Fun Ride

4 km Family Ride, Stride, Roll & Stroll

BBQ starting at 11 AM

Kid's Fun Centre

Balloon Animals

Music by John Lloyd's "One Big Smile"

See enclosed pledge form! For more information, visit

[www.autismottawa.com](http://www.autismottawa.com)

**BREAKING NEWS:** The Microsoft Golf Classic has donated three adult Telluride Mountain Bikes as prizes for our Cycle this year. For every \$300 you collect in pledges you will get one entry into the draw for one of these fabulous new bicycles. So keep going with those pledges and you could ride away with a brand new bike!

**Other ASO News:**

- **ASPIRATIONS FIRST MEETING OF THE YEAR.** Monday, September 18, 2006 at 7 PM. For more information, please contact Paul Anderson at [Paul.Anderson@international.gc.ca](mailto:Paul.Anderson@international.gc.ca) or 613-725-0459 or Bob Basil at 613-723-8488 or <http://aspirations.topcities.com>.
- **LIFETIME NETWORKS.** The AO is planning a Future Planning workshop to help families plan for the future when they will no longer be able to look after their family members with disabilities to be held on Saturday, October 14, 2006, from 9am till 3pm.
- **A PLAY CALLED 'NEVIL'.** Families Matter Co-operative Inc. is proud to announce that "Nevil", an award winning one-act play by former Ottawa resident, Monika Schneider, is returning for a limited two engagements on October 21, 2006. Tickets are available at 613-733-0112 or 613-232-8115.
- **BOOK RECOMMENDATION.** *The Explosive Child - Understanding and Helping Easily Frustrated, "Chronically Inflexible" Children* contains a lot of help for parenting our complicated kids. Very respectful of both parents and their children. More information about the book is available at: <http://www.explosivechild.com>.

**EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MAGAZINE**

*(Complimentary issue attached.)*

The Exceptional Family Magazine is Canada's resource magazine for parents of exceptional children and contains inspirational stories about exceptional families.

We encourage families to consider subscribing - subscriptions cost \$17.95 (for one year) and \$34.99 (for two years). This issue (Vol. 1 No. 4, Summer 2006) contains an article entitled: What is so Fragile about Fragile X Syndrome? Common features and significant differences between autism and Fragile X Syndrome.

We want to thank the Miriam Foundation for not only providing Children at Risk with these free copies, but picking up the shipping, as well!

**UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA'S CHILDHOOD COGNITION & LEARNING LAB (CCLL) AUTISM STUDY**

Would you like to help us learn more about the development of future thinking and planning skills in children with autism and Asperger's syndrome?

At the CCLL, we are beginning a study examining these abilities in children and teens with autism and Asperger's syndrome.

If you have a child between the ages of 3 and 15, we invite you to take part in the study.

If you are interested or would like more information, please call Laura at 613-562-5800, Ext. 4475, or Dr. Cristina Atance at 613-562-5800, Ext. 4476.

**Help your Child Make Friends**

By Gabrielle Bauer

*Experts agree that social skills are just as important to your child's future as the three R's. But where do you start?*

By age seven, Jeremy Lin was getting straight A's in school but failing socially. Rather than interact with other children, the Burlington youngster retreated behind a book. When adults other than relatives talked to him, he answered in monosyllables.

Jeremy's mother, Amy, was upset but not surprised. Young for his grade to begin with, Jeremy skipped Grade 2, increasing the age gap between him and his peers. He spent so much time alone that he got little practice talking to other people of any age.

Amy wanted to help her son, but wondered how. Should she dunk him in the deep end of the social pool – for instance, by sending him to camp – or let him get his toes wet at his own pace? Should she limit his reading the way some parents limit television time? Should she urge him to make play dates?

Social competence is a skill we often take for granted. We put our children in school so they can learn how to read, write and calculate. But we spend little time teaching them social skills, assuming this aspect of development just falls into place.

Yet Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner lists "interpersonal" intelligence as one of eight basic human aptitudes. Just as some children are naturally gifted in math, others are gifted at relating to people. At the other extreme are children who seem to lack social antennas altogether. They're the kids you find kicking a stone near the school-yard fence.

The good news is that social competence can be improved – and it's an effort worth making. According to Marion Porath, a University of British Columbia professor of educational psychology, studies have linked social competence to academic achievement.

Social aptitude can make or break careers and relationships in the adult world, adds Shirley Vandersteen, past president of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta. "Poor social skills put you at a greater disadvantage than poor spelling," she adds.

How then can parents teach this fundamental life skill to their children? Here are some pointers:

**The Basics**

Let's start with the social skills we've all expected to have. Saying hello, please and thank you, and answering a question – all fall into this category, says Kathy Lynn, a Vancouver-based parent educator and radio-show host.

## Help your Child Make Friends (cont'd)

“If an adult asks a child how school is going, the child should be expected to answer politely, even if she’s been asked the same question a dozen times before,” says Lynn. Answering “fine” is acceptable, but barely, she adds. “You can suggest more suitable alternatives, such as ‘I like math but not French.’”

Carole Snow, a Toronto school-teacher and mother of three children, says one of her family’s rules is that they must all greet every visitor to the house. “That includes repairmen and door-to-door canvassers,” she says. “And they have to look the person in the eye.”

Another basic: how to shake hands. “People are judged on their handshake,” says Lynn. She recommends showing your child how long and how firmly to shake hands, and then practicing together until the child gets it right.

Then there’s the art of speaking in turn. Jan Pelletier, a professor at the University of Toronto’s Institute of Child Study, says parents shouldn’t presume this skill is instinctive and should give explicit instructions on how to do it. For example: “Listening means keeping your eyes on the speaker and your hands quiet. You can use sounds such as *mm-hmm* to show you understand or agree with what the speaker is saying. And wait until the speaker is finished before you start talking.”

### But .... She’s So Shy

Shyness is by no means uncommon. Research shows that between 15 and 20 percent of babies are born with an anxious temperament, and about three quarters of these grow up to be chronically shy. That’s 11 to 15 percent of all children.

It’s upsetting to watch your shy child stumble socially, and you may feel compelled to do something about it. Here’s what usually *doesn’t* work, says Martin Antony, director of the Anxiety Treatment and Research Centre at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Hamilton and coauthor of *The Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook*: nagging, forcing the child to perform in high-pressure situations, or exposing him to a potentially embarrassing situation without warning. “Unpredictable exposure can lead to an escalation of the social anxiety,” Antony says.

The best approach, says Antony, is the same type of “graduated exposure” that helps people overcome airplane or spider phobias. Suppose your son is afraid of talking to strangers. You might first ask him to show a toy to the “nice lady in the park” that you sometimes see; the next time you might encourage him to say a few words to her. “By proceeding in small, safe increments, the parent can help his child up to the hard stuff, such as speaking at a party full of strangers,” Antony says.

Also helpful, says Pelletier, is teaching your child how to ease herself into a group at play. “One approach is to suggest a role for herself, such as ‘I’ll be the mommy,’” Pelletier says. “If the other kids say they already have a mommy, she can suggest being a big sister or a taxi driver.”

To a shy child, the Internet may seem a dream come true – a chance to connect socially without the risk of rejection. But it can also delay the acquisition of true social confidence. Carole Snow limits her children’s after-school computer time to one hour. “Then I send them out to play with the neighbours’ kids. At least this way I know they’re getting their quota of group play.”

### The Power of Practice

Before a piano performance, a child may practice his pieces for weeks. But we rarely give children the opportunity to practice for big social challenges, which can loom as large as a Carnegie Hall recital in their minds.

Enter role-playing – what Pelletier calls the social equivalent of piano scales. If your child is anticipating a socially daunting situation – for instance, a school dance dominated by acid-tongued clique leaders – you can role-play how she might deal with barbs from such people. Charlene Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, authors of the book *Cliques*, advise using humour whenever possible. For example:

Clique leader: “Nice hair, NOT.”

Possible response: “You should see me on a bad hair day.”



## Help your Child Make Friends (cont'd)

Children can also benefit from practicing ordinary conversations, and the dinner table is a good place to do it. Instead of the tried-and-true clunker, “Did anything interesting happen in school today?” Kathy Lynn recommends you start with an amusing anecdote: “The funniest thing happened at work today...” This lets the child segue into his own anecdotes without feeling as though he’s on a witness stand.

No topic should be off-limits, adds Lynn, and telling jokes should be encouraged. “Being able to tell a joke reflects social competence,” Lynn says, “and there’s no better way to learn than by listening to others do it.”

Also be sure to practice talking with your child about feelings. Socially competent children can put feelings into words. “Ask a younger child how he would feel if his best friend got sick, and ask an older child how she would feel if her best friend started avoiding her,” Porath suggests.

### Common Ground

Sometimes, as in Jeremy Lin’s case, children get stuck in a social rut because they have little in common with their peers. One solution is to link your child up with others who share his interests. Amy Lin enrolled Jeremy in a chess club, and science and computer camps. His awkwardness began melting away in the company of his true peers.

Grooming and attire count, too. When Carole Snow visited her ten year-old son’s school, she discovered that his clothing wasn’t in step with his age. “I had been dressing him in cute things that were more appropriate for a younger child,” she says. “Seeing all the other boys in their hooded sweatshirts really brought this point home to me.”

Snow’s next stop was a children’s clothing store, where she stocked up on baggy pants, sweatshirts and a fleece vest for her son. Now, she says, “he looks more like a Grade 5 student. His clothing doesn’t put him at a social disadvantage anymore.”

Snow’s observations raise an important point: Can a parent influence a child’s social standing among peers? “I don’t think parents have the power to fix peer problems,” says Edmonton psychologist Bonnie Haave. “What the parent can do is help the child feel less anxious about the whole popularity scene.”

Psychologist Shirley Vandersteen cautions against trying to change your child’s basic nature in the course of teaching her how to be social. “Don’t expect your introvert to be the life of the party,” she says. “It’s perfectly fine if she has two or three close friends.”

Ultimately, the best thing a parent can do is to teach by example. Amy Lin showed Jeremy how to behave through her own interactions – at the park, on the phone, in the school yard. Slowly but surely, a more socially confident Jeremy began to emerge.

Jeremy is now thriving in a public-school program for gifted children. When Amy drops him off, other children run up to greet him – something that never happened before. “I used to worry that the social thing would never fall into place for him,” she reflects. “It’s nice to know that a child with a slow start socially can still build up his skills.”

*Note: Article taken from Reader’s Digest (October 2002)*

## **Siblings of Disabled Have Their Own Troubles**

Byline: By GRETCHEN COOK

When he was growing up in Oregon, Graham Seaton found it virtually impossible to bring children home from school to play.

“I knew there was something wrong with my place,” he recalled. “But I didn’t know how to explain what that was.”

He knew that he would have to tell his friends why they could play only in his bedroom -- and only with the door locked. And that, ultimately, he would have to explain what was “wrong” with his older brother Burleigh, who is profoundly autistic.

“I just didn’t have the words,” he said.

Now 30, Mr. Seaton said he realized that as a child, he felt he could not ask his parents for those words.

“I was so aware I couldn’t make a big deal with my family,” he said. “My parents already had enough on their hands.”

An estimated seven million “typically developing” American children have siblings with disabilities, according to the Arc of the United States, a leading advocacy group for the mentally retarded. Those children face many of the same challenges -- and joys -- as their parents, but they also face other problems. Some resent the extra demands placed on them at an early age by their disabled siblings, and many feel neglected by their often overburdened parents.

Some children say they fear “catching” their siblings’ disabilities. Others may wish that they, too, were disabled, so that they could get all the attention their siblings do. And many suffer embarrassment about their siblings’ inappropriate behavior or abnormal appearance, and then feel guilty about it.

These are difficult emotions for children to struggle with, and Don Meyer, director of the Arc’s sibling support project, says the needs of siblings like Mr. Seaton are often overlooked. Most assistance organizations and support groups are intended for disabled children themselves or for their parents.

“These brothers and sisters will likely have the longest-lasting relationships of anyone, relationships easily in excess of 65 years,” Mr. Meyer said. “They should be remembered at every turn.”

Still, many siblings welcome the early maturity and responsibility that come with having a disabled brother or sister. They are often well versed in the details of their siblings’ disabilities, and they take pride in being able to explain them in sophisticated ways. For example, Hannah, 16, of Dearborn, Mich., who did not want her last name used out of concerns for her privacy, said she related better to adults than to children her age because of having to cope with her brother Ian’s autism.

But that maturity does not inoculate her from embarrassment about Ian’s outbursts, particularly during church services.

“Sometimes he’ll kind of start making noises, and then sometimes he’ll kick and flail his arms, or he’ll start rocking and crying,” Hannah said. “My mother will take him outside, but its still, like, okayyyyyy.”

Suzanne Ripley, who has two sons with cerebral palsy, says that a child’s disability can embarrass parents, too, but that embarrassment can be more acute for siblings, especially those in the throes of adolescent conformity. Young siblings are also prone to teasing from other children, who do not have the social inhibitions of adults.

## **Siblings of Disabled Have Their Own Troubles (cont'd)**

But Ms. Ripley, the director of the National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities, based in Washington, notes that adults can often be just as rude.

“People tend to be uncomfortable with anyone who’s different, so they look for a second and then look away,” Ms. Ripley said. “Imagine how that would make you feel” as a child.

Parents like Ms. Ripley are likely to seek comfort through talking with others about their conflicting emotions. But children may not have the sophistication to do so or they may feel guilty about acknowledging any negative feelings they have.

Hannah, for example, says she loves her 13-year-old brother and feels terrible about her reactions to his outbursts.

“I know it’s not his fault and that’s the way he is, and so I shouldn’t really be embarrassed, but sometimes I am,” she said.

But she said she did not discuss those feelings with her parents.

“They’d get that, ‘Oh well, you can deal with it’ kind of attitude,” she said. “I know they would listen, but they would get defensive.”

Ally Cirelli, a 9-year-old in Towson, Md., whose sister is developmentally disabled, says the biggest complaint she hears from her peers is that the disabled siblings get all the attention.

Some are so jealous of their siblings that they wish they had their own disability, and the special treatment that comes with it, she said. But Ally, too, avoids talking to her parents about her feelings. And she is quick to backpedal when she does talk about it, insisting that her sister, Katie, 8, does not embarrass her “all that often,” and that she is “really fun” to play with.

Mr. Meyer, of the Arc, says children need a place where they can openly discuss these concerns and emotions. To fill this gap, he started the sibling support project, which is based in Seattle and provides information and holds discussion groups for children around the country. In 2005, Mr. Meyer also published “The Sibling Slam Book: What It’s Really Like to Have a Brother or Sister With Special Needs,” a collection of candid remarks by 80 children.

Mr. Meyer said that when asked about the most embarrassing moment of their lives, few of the children cited anything having to do with their disabled siblings. Instead, most recounted the usual teenage humiliations: problems in romantic relationships or dealing with parents.

And that, Mr. Meyer says, underscores an important point: “When I talk to parents about embarrassment (about disabled siblings), I ask them to keep in mind that it’s an age-related condition,” he said. “That’s the good news, that a lot of that seems to be resolved by even their late teens.”

The work of disability advocates and the mainstreaming of children with special needs in schools and in the wider society has fostered more awareness of -- and less discomfort with -- disabilities.

Ms. Ripley, for her part, says she has noticed a change in public attitudes, especially when she is struggling to maneuver with her sons in public places.

“I’m finding that people are more and more helpful,” she said. “That didn’t used to happen.”

***Note: Article taken from New York Times (April 4, 2006)***

**Please contact our office at 613-741-8255 for Sibling Support Group Registration forms or download them at [www.childrenatrisk.ca](http://www.childrenatrisk.ca)**



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*Cookie Decorating*



*Balloon Toss Game*



*Fish Tank Game*



*T-Shirt and Plasma Car Draw*



*Ticket Sales/Reception*



*Brenda, Clown and Dean*



*Photographer's Family (Marlene)*



*Janie, Andreas and kids*

